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THE EXPRESSION OF THE SOCIAL VALUE OF WATER AMONG THE NAMAN OF SOUTH-WEST AFRICA.

BY

MRS. R. F. A. HOERNLÉ, B.A. (*née* MISS A. W. TUCKER).

Read July 13, 1923.

312 231 It seems hardly necessary to emphasise, before a South African audience, the importance of water in a country like South-West Africa, the home of the Naman. They are a pastoral people, to whom "God gave cattle as their grass," as one of them put it to me, so that a good supply of fodder and water are the two essentials of their existence. Grass is often easier to find than water.

133 132 231 When Moffat, over a hundred years ago, inquired of a traveller in South-West Africa what the country was like to which he was journeying he was told: "Sir, you will find plenty of sand and stones, a thinly scattered population always suffering from want of water, on plains and hills roasted like a burnt loaf, under the scorching rays of a cloudless sky." That is a pretty good description of the country in the south which is the home of the Naman, in its normal condition, yet it only wants a few regular showers of rain to convert it into a veritable sea of grass, such as it is now after the wonderful season of rain that is just finished there. Grass there is enough for animals, wild and tame, for at least three years to come, yet long before that time much of it will have become inaccessible, or would have done under primitive conditions, because it will be too far removed from the nearest available water. Ten years ago, when I was travelling through the Richtersveld in a season of great drought, we came upon secluded spots where there was grass in plenty, which was still nourishing enough in spite of the fact that it was dry, yet the natives were creeping miserably along the rugged banks of the Orange, feeding their animals on the quick grass at the edge, for they did not dare to move away from the precious water. This sort of experience makes one realise vividly that it is water which must be the first thought in planning any settlement, or in deciding on any trek, and the quantity of water available will determine the numbers which can settle at any one spot and the length of time during which they can stay there.

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NOTE.—It has not been possible to indicate the tone of the Hottentot words in all cases where it was necessary, owing to typographical difficulties. Also, it was not possible to indicate a nasalised *a* for the same reason.

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Quite apart from the customs and ceremonies of the Naman, we can judge of the importance they attach to water from the fact that they distinguish all the various ways in which water may be conserved, and name every spot in their territory where these different kinds of water may be found, so that the greater proportion of places to which the natives have given names are precisely those at which there is water. 312 823 192

Besides the !Ab, the river, where water can most often be found, at any rate in secluded hollows where a granite bottom has prevented the water from sinking below, and deep gorges have protected it from too much evaporation, we have the /óus, the spring, which may be either hot or cold, and is often very brack or even salt. "The frequency of this designation in both its masculine and feminine form as the only name of a place," writes Dr. K. Dove, "proves the extraordinary importance that is attached to perennial water, in the dry steppes of Namaland."* Two hot springs called /Ai //Gáma, "fire water," have been important centres of settlement, Windhoek in the north, Warmbad in the south. But, in addition to rivers and springs, we have the Xorás, or Xorábes, the water-hole dug in the moist sand in protected spots in the river beds, and there is the ǂgāb or ǂgās, the deeper well. Further, we have the //gardib, the natural reservoirs or basins in hollowed-out rock, mostly granite. These are veritable blessings very often when one is travelling over large waterless tracts, and every native knows each one in the territory of his tribe. But, of course, their supply is strictly limited, and they are apt to be quite dry before the next rainy season unless they are very large. There are also the //gòm //gami, the pond, the /ā̀p, or vlei, and the !khowis, the depressions which are filled with water for a short time after rains, and which, with the //gardib, enable grass not otherwise accessible to be used for a short time.

Another indication of the vast importance attached to water by the Naman is to be found in the annual rain ceremony. This is, or rather was in the old days, by far the most important social ceremony of the whole year.—I heard of this ceremony among all the tribes I visited and had full descriptions of it, but it was not until this last visit to South-West Africa that I was fortunate enough to meet with an old man, who claims to be the hereditary chief of the gēi //Khauan, the chief tribe of the Naman, and who still holds the old rain ceremony every year at his home in !Hoaxa!nas. Thanks to the kindly assistance of the Administration of South-West Africa, who supplied the necessary slaughter animals, we were able to perform this ceremony with pretty nearly all its attendant rites in Windhoek this last year, and it was rather pathetic to see the joy, not unmixed with doubt, among the natives, when later on the phenomenal rains fell all over the 789 796

* "Geographische Bezeichnungen in der Namasprache," in *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen* an der König Friedrich Wilhelm Universität zu Berlin. Jahrgang III (1900), pp. 57—65.

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789 country. So sure were they that their ceremonies, done in the real old way, had brought the rain that they actually went to
796 tell their missionary of what we had done, but he was not sympathetic, and they appealed to me on my return from the north, half wistful, half doubting, asking if I had ever heard of such rains since the white man came into their country. I have given a short description of this ceremony in *Bantu Studies*,* and I do not want to go into detail here. The essential thing is that the whole tribe, or as many of them as possibly could, gathered together at the chief's kraal to take part in this guriba ‡ap, which was to ensure the coming of rain in the New Year.

Rather than linger over this feast, which provides if possible for an adequate supply of water for the life of the tribe, I want to describe in this paper the ceremonies which are performed with the water which actually is available.

Water is essential to any community, but it is only where it is exceedingly scarce, as among our people, that we find it playing so large a part in the ceremonial practices.

182 Taking water, then, as an example of something extremely
823 important to the Naman, I wish to show that they believe it to have great protective powers against any antisocial forces, but at the same time to be extremely dangerous to the members of the society whenever they are withdrawn in any way from the powerful protection which society gives them. Thus the social character of water is ambivalent. Whilst in the normal routine life of the tribe it is used with impunity, and indeed with little regard or ceremony, it acquires on critical occasions a twofold significance. It becomes, on the one hand, a source of protection against evils threatening the tribe and its members, and it is, on the other hand, a danger to the members of the tribe who are, for one reason or another, in a critical condition. I wish to suggest further that this protective power is simply the expression of the social value of water.

182 It is to Professor Brown that we owe this concept of "social value" and the light it throws on so many seemingly trivial customs among primitive people. His use of this concept in his analysis of the Andamanese customs and beliefs gave me the clue to many practices which I had noticed so often among the Naman. Interpreting the Andamanese customs, Professor Brown† writes: "By the social value of any thing, I mean the way in which that thing affects or is capable of affecting the social life. Value may be either positive or negative, positive value being possessed by anything that contributes to the well-being of society, negative value by anything that can adversely affect that well-being." The individual accustomed, especially in childhood, to have the necessaries of social life provided for him by others.

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* *Bantu Studies*, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 3, 4.

† "*The Andaman Islanders*," by A. R. Brown. Cambridge, 1922, Ch. V. p. 364.

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might take them more or less for granted, that is to say, as Professor Brown puts it, " he does not of necessity consciously and directly realise that value. He is made to realise it indirectly, through the belief impressed upon him by tradition, that the thing in question affords protection against danger."* And, further, I would stress, that this same protective thing is dangerous apart from the full social life. It is not claimed that the leaders of the tribe have wittingly used these means to make the individuals in it appreciate the blessings they have, but an analysis of primitive ceremonial enables us to conclude that this is the psychological basis of many of the customs; and that they are the means used to maintain the cohesion of the tribe, by making its members realise that to society they owe the things of value they have, so that they are willing to keep up the old customs and traditions on which it is believed the well-being of the whole depends. "So that the protective uses of such things," says Professor Brown, " are really rites or ceremonies by means of which the individual is made to realise (1) his own dependence on the society and its possessions, and (2) the social value of the things in question."† Things which are useful to the community, important for its existence, come to partake, as it were, of the strength of the community, and by this power they afford protection to its members. 182

Let us first consider the protective power of water. Among the Topnaars of Walvis Bay and the Zwartboys of Franzfontein, and probably among all the Naman, cold water is, or was formerly, thrown on the grave of a person newly buried, and often the men return again the next day to throw more water on the grave. The reason given me was that it hardened the grave, so that no wild beasts could dig there, but the reason given to Theophilus Hahn in the seventies of last century was that it " cooled the soul of the departed."‡ Further, when the people return from the grave to the kraal, all the inmates, except the bereaved family and the near relatives, who must on no account touch water, wash their hands in cold water, and cold water is sprinkled on the place in the hut where the body was lying before it was taken to be buried. In itself the washing of the hands with water might not be significant, especially as each person is obliged by custom to pick up handfuls of earth and throw them into the grave, and one might suppose that they were merely washing the dust off, but we have noted that the near relatives do not touch the water, and, further, the reason given for the washing on the part of the other inmates is that they would get sick if they did not do so. The cold water sprinkled in the hut also prevents the sickness that was there from spreading. 823 764

Now, one of the great dreads of the Naman is the /Hei /Nûn, the ghosts which hover over the graves, or come from them, and who formerly were thought to cause most of the sickness among 753 774 761

* *Ibid.*, p. 264.
† *Ibid.*, p. 264.
‡ *Tsui-/Goam, the Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoin*, T. Hahn, p. 113.

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753 774 761 the Naman, either themselves, or through the !Gèi Aogu, the medicine men. Nowadays, there are great differences among the people with regard to the dread of the /Heí /Nūn, some people not fearing to go even to the grave, whereas others would on no account go near one, especially after sunset. If one asks a Nama why he is afraid of the grave, he answers it is because of the thing that is in there, the skeleton, which he says is a fearsome thing. No Nama will touch a dead man's bones, if he can help it, and on the Orange River, when I found a skeleton on the sand dunes and picked it up, my native guide told me the /Heí /Nūn would surely follow us, did they not know I was not afraid of them. When people are alone the /Heí /Nūn come chasing them, and I have had many an instance given me of persons arriving home utterly worn out and exhausted after such a chase, who almost always died shortly afterwards. In Windhoek among the Zwartboys I found the /Heí /Nūn were very much dreaded, and I was told of very many cases where they had appeared to the people during the influenza epidemic, when they had tried to drag their victims off to the grave, that is, to kill them. Further, old Christian, a Bondelzwart, told me that often when a man has died he appears to a member of the family in sleep. When the sleeper wakes he will say, " //Gán osi, !uri ǂkóp gúiba ta go mu " (no flesh, a white bone alone I saw). The old people then say that the person who has died has come to fetch another of them; one of the family will die.* Relatives, then, especially near relatives, are in much greater danger than other people. They are likely to sicken and die, and it is from the /Heí /Nūn that this sickness and danger are thought to come. These relatives must go through a much longer process of purification which will be mentioned later on,* but the ordinary inmates, as we have seen, protect themselves immediately by the use of cold water.

823 821 [753] The next instance of the protective use of water will make the first one clearer. When a whirlwind, a Sarés, comes swirling through a kraal and passes by a hut, the inmates rush inside, get cold water, and throw it in the path of the wind. Did they not take this precaution someone would surely die. I have exact statements that this is so among the Topnaars, the Zwartboys, the Rooi Natie, three of the aboriginal tribes of Great Namaqualand. This is the description that old //Kabib, the Topnaar, gave me. " In the old days when a whirlwind came by, the people would shout, ' Phu—u, bé re, taës ǂā hū kun !kun !kun phu—u ' (Phu—u, please depart, what do you seek here, go, go, go, phu—u) and cold water would be quickly fetched and sprinkled in its path. ' This expression, phu—u, is used only by the Topnaars, so far as I know, among the Naman, and the other tribes say the Topnaars got it from the Klip Kafirs or Hau Khoin. Of its exact significance when used by the Klip Kafirs I have at present no information, but by the Topnaars it is often used when making a solemn address of this kind.

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* See p. 524.

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The other name for Sarés, the whirlwind, is //Gãuab, translated nowadays by the word devil, and having exactly this significance for the natives, owing to missionary influence. It is very difficult to get a complete understanding of what the natives originally understood by //Gãuab. In the mythology of the people //Gãuab is the evil chief who kills great numbers of Tsui //Goab's people, and Tsui //Goab is the great hero of the Nama and other Khoi Khoin tribes. Tsui //Goab went to war with //Gãuab and finally destroyed him by giving him a blow behind the ear. But though destroyed by Tsui //Goab, he came alive again, and one form of the legend tells the story as though the fight were an annual one. However that may be, //Gãuab is also connected with the /Heí /Nũn, in fact, /Gãunagu in the plural is simply another name for /Heí /Nũn, and old David Zwartboy, the present chief of his tribe, insisted very earnestly to me that the /Heí /Nũn were simply //Gãuab. "The names are two, but the thing is one," he said. David's views are strongly tinged by missionary teaching, and for him the /Heí /Nũn which troubled him so much when he had influenza are simply evil spirits sent by the devil to trouble him.

Further than this in the analysis I do not want to go here, but I think I have said enough to show that a whirlwind is a thing of evil omen, a form which the /Heí /Nũn or //Gãuab can take, and that it brings sickness and perhaps death to the inhabitants of the kraal unless precautions are taken, and that those precautions consist chiefly in scattering cold water in its path.

Again, when one is visiting an old locality of a tribe, one is exposed to all kinds of dangers. The ghosts of the //Núon, the ancestors, haunt the place and one must protect oneself against them and propitiate them if one is to escape. Thus, ten years ago I visited, with a native guide, a spot which had long been deserted by the Topnaars. It was a long day's journey up and down great sand dunes, and both I and my guide caught bad colds. The next day my guide's wife came to see me, shaking her head wisely. "I knew I should find you ill," she said, "and I have been scolding my husband, who should have known better. When you got to Wortel you should have gone straight to the water, and put a stripe of wet clay on your legs and on your forehead, and then you should have said:

'Tí //Náoxan !Hutse, (My ancestors' territory),

!Gãise !khoi !ón te re. (Run nicely to meet me),

Then all would have been well."

eibe mutsi.' (I see you first.)

In this case, the water is not sprinkled about or splashed on to the person, but from the water-hole wet clay is taken and put on to the body. I think the important thing here is that one begs the goodwill of the spirits, claims relationship with them, and enters once more into possession of the old tribal

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751 823 182 territory by contact with its waters. A similar ceremony takes place when a Nama goes visiting relatives in another tribe. The head of the kraal visited must take wet clay and black from the pot, and put a broad stripe on the visitor's forehead, so that he may be able to "eat nicely and drink nicely," as my informant put it. Here it would seem the stranger is given the protection of the society into which he has entered, and is free from danger that might otherwise beset him in a strange place. The preceding example shows perhaps what the danger is, namely, the hostile /Heí /Nūn, and this example makes a little clearer the nature of the protection sought when one is visiting an old locality of the tribe. One identifies oneself with the place and its spirits, and so gets protection and support instead of hostility.

751 The use of soot black from the pots is also very interesting, but I do not want to go into many details here. It is always used as a sign that one is being admitted to the full life of the society, and so to its protection. Thus, one must put a black mark on a baby when it visits one's werft for the first time, otherwise it will be ill, and after a period of isolation from the full life of the tribe this black mark is always put on the forehead at the ceremonial meal which signalises the reintroduction to full social life

754 756 823 [797] The next example is a little different. In the old days, there were among the Naman !Gèi Aŏgu, witch doctors, men who could cure people who had been bewitched, but who might also themselves resort to bewitching, and so make people ill or kill them. I have never myself met with a real !Gèi aop unfortunately, and it is very hard to get from the natives any account of their training or method of becoming !Gèi Aogu. The missionaries have exerted all their influence to prohibit the practices of the witch doctor, and it is probably hard to find a Nama to-day who really knows all the secrets of the profession. An old man of the Bondelzwart tribe told me that a child born with a caul might become a clever !Gèi aop, if he were given the caul to eat as a child. Others, however, have told me such a child became a gobo aop, a seer. In any case, it is certain that the !Gèi aop was considered in some way connected with the /Heí /Nūn, and therefore had an immunity which others had not. He could impart his immunity to others and so cure them of disease by inoculating them with his essence, as it were, which was contained in his body dirt and perspiration, and which he could scrape off as he needed it. The !Gèi Aop was, therefore, a person of considerable importance in a community, and was much respected so long as he used his power for good, but he might also use it for evil, causing sickness instead of curing it. Now, the Naman considered that all sickness was caused either by //Gāunb.* or the /Heí /Núm, or by persons somehow in contact with them, the witchcraft practitioners, and one of the

* See Theophilus Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 87, and Peter Kolben, *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum*, first German edition, 1719, p. 438.

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ordinary duties of !Gèi Aop was to discover the source of the sickness. If, however, it was thought that he himself was causing sickness, the community had a sure way of protecting itself from him. For, cold water was absolutely fatal to his power, and in ordinary life he never touched it on any account. Should it be decided that the !Gèi aop has caused sickness or death among the people, the chief will order him to be deprived of all his powers. I have two instances in which this has happened; one among the Berseba people, one among the Zwartboys far to the north. The !Gèi aop is taken to the nearest pool of water, and is ducked completely. His power oozes away from him into the water as it were, and he is as an ordinary man once more. As the !Gèi aop is rendered innocuous, so, too, is his medicine. I was told in Walvis Bay by a mother how her daughter had been !Gèied, and how she nearly died, but how at length she got the medicine which is all powerful against all !Gèi methods. This is the //A !naip, the kidney of a species of jackal, which has a smell so strong and penetrating, that it is too much even for any !Gèi medicine. When this was given to the girl, she vomited and brought up the little !Gèi sticks and leaves which had been doing all the mischief. The mother showed these sticks and leaves to some old men who took them all away and threw them into cold water, so that their power was gone for ever.

Another instance of the same kind is that of certain medicinal roots. When any of the roots which are considered really powerful are dug from the ground, something has to be given in return, otherwise the root will not act, and similarly when it is passed from person to person, a present must also be given. When taking the root one addresses it thus: " A, //na ta gye nesi go khau, o ta gye huí te damats, gara i o, !kéi //gams !na ni áo ǂgā tsi." (Ah, there I have dug this, and if you don't help me, harming me rather, I shall throw you into cold water.)

All the foregoing instances illustrate the protective power of water. Things or persons which might harm members of the society are rendered harmless by immersion in cold water, or by the application of cold water to them, or, as in revisiting an old place of habitation, or on returning from the grave, one can protect oneself from harm by applying wet clay or water to oneself.

Before turning to the other set of examples in which water is considered dangerous, I should like to mention one or two customs from the literature. I could not find any evidence that these customs are kept up now by the tribes I have come in contact with, but they fit in very well with what I have been saying.

Peter Kolben* tells us that the Hottentots before crossing a river go down to the edge, splash themselves with water, and smear their foreheads with sand or clay.

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* *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum*, first German edition, 2nd part, Vth Letter. p. 419.

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823 271 782 Sir James Alexander† tells us that the Hottentots of the Kuisib river had to make an offering to Tusib before they could drink water with safety. Alexander calls the man of whom he speaks a Bushman, but his name shows that he was a Nama. "Numeep, the Bushman guide, came to me labouring under an attack of dysentery and he said that he was about to die! I asked him what had occasioned the disease; and he said it was from having dug for water at the place called Kuisib, in the bed of the Kuisib river, without first having made an offering, and that therefore he was sure to die unless I could help him. I asked him what he meant by saying he had made no offering at Kuisib. 'Before any Bushman,' said Numeep, 'digs for water at Kuisib he must lay down a piece of flesh, seeds of the Naras, or an arrow, or anything else he may have about him and can spare as an offering to Toosip, the old man of the water.' I asked Numeep if he had ever seen Toosip. 'No, I have never seen him, nor has anyone else that I know of, but we believe that he is a great Redman with white hair, and who can do us good and harm. He has neither bow nor assegai nor has he a wife.' 'Do you say anything to him when you put down your offering at the waterplace?' 'We say, Oh! great father, son of a Bushman, give me food; give me the flesh of the rhinoceros, of the gemsbok, of the zebra, or what I require to have! But I was in such a hurry to drink this morning that I scratched away the sand above the water and took no notice of Toosip; and he was so angry, that if you had not helped me I must have died!'

823 751 Nowadays the natives do not know anything of Tusip, but Tup is the rain and Tu ǂOap is the rain wind, so that we have here at any rate the rain, or water-giver. I have not found anything quite similar to this among the present-day natives, but we shall see below that water is dangerous, causing sickness, if not death, unless treated in the proper way, just as in this case.

The last instance I have found in the literature is the following. Hahn* says: "If a Khoikhoi go out hunting, his wife must go to the water and commence throwing it about the ground. If she is tired her servant must continue pouring water about. If this be neglected, her husband will not be successful."

Turning now to the second set of examples, we shall see that persons removed from their regular life in the community are in great danger from water.

571 561 In normal Nama society each person belongs to a definite stratum, as it were, and in each stratum the members have definite duties, know exactly their place in the whole and the correct manner of behaving, both towards the mates in their own stratum, and to those either above or below it. There are, first, the children, divided up into groups of mates, with about

† *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa*, 1836-7, Vol. II, p. 125.
* *Tsuni ||Goam*. p. 77.

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three years between each group, the members of which call each other "mates." When these children attain the age of puberty, they are no longer children, but neither are they as yet full members of the tribe, nor fully grown up, and so for a period more or less prolonged they belong nowhere and are removed from the solidarity and security of their former position. They are in a state of great instability, exposed to dangers of all kinds, and unless they take the greatest care, and follow scrupulously the course of behaviour prescribed for them by their elders, sickness, if not death, will overtake them; but finally they are received into the stratum of the fully grown, and they are then once more secure. Again, people who are married form a definite group, divided, of course, into younger and older married people. If the mate of one of these people dies, the survivor can no longer belong to the group of the married, but must be received into the group of the widowed, and until the full ceremonies have been performed, this person, too, is in a precarious position, and is subject to all kinds of restrictions. Should he or she later on re-marry, they must be received into still another group, that of the twice-wed. But, even within any one group one is liable to be cut off from the full activity of its life, and so from enjoying the full measure of its protection, and at such times, too, life becomes precarious and full of restrictions. Thus, a woman after childbirth is withdrawn from her usual life and must be purified and received once more into her group. So, too, in former days was a girl during her period. Disease, again, removes a man from social life, and he, too, must be cleansed before he can take it up again, and until that is done he must exercise great care. Certain diseases are best cured by the patient being made a member of the group of those who have had it and recovered. The worse a person has had a disease from which he has recovered, the more likely is he to be able to give protection and cure to others. The thing to do, then, is to get oneself inoculated by such a man with his essence, that is, with some of his body-dirt, and so become imbued with his immunity. During this process, again, great care must be exercised.

Now, in all the cases I have instanced, the person whose social equilibrium is, so to speak, unstable, is in great danger from water, and must not on any account touch it. It will be sufficient to give a description of one type of case, for the procedure is the same in all.

When a girl gets her first period, when she is said to Kharú, she is at once cut off from the ordinary life of the kraal, is confined in a small dark hut, built inside her mother's, and must lie there quite still, wrapped closely in her sheepskin blanket, not daring even to speak above a whisper. She is, however, visited by her friends, who grind sweet smelling leaves and bark into powder for her, and with this powder, or buchu, she is copiously covered. All the time she is in this hut she must not touch cold water, and must be protected in many other

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841 ways, which it is not necessary to mention here. When she is ready to come out, a matron, who has been a successful 823 married woman, with many children whom she has reared, but who is now past the child-bearing age, and who has taken charge of the girl all through her seclusion at the invitation of the mother, enters her hut, cleanses the girl of all her Axa /urip, her child dirt. This is very thoroughly done, as I have myself seen, with melted butter and wet cow-dung, every inch of the girl's body being well scoured. The girl is then given a complete set of new clothing, and is led into the outer hut by the matron with whom she prepares a meal for the other women assembled [272 to receive her. Nowadays, it is tea or coffee she prepares, 177] formerly it was meat slaughtered for the occasion. The matron must hold her hand as she takes the pot, and aid her with each thing she does. Soot from the pot is put on her forehead, and together the old woman and she eat a piece of meat prepared apart from the rest. So she is made free to cook and prepare a meal once more. Similarly, she must be reintroduced to all her daily tasks by the old woman. They milk together, gather wood together, collect roots and berries. Towards evening, when the usual time comes for getting the household supply of water, she goes accompanied by all the old women, the matron in charge of her walking just in front of her, another old woman behind, as they move along in single file. Arrived at the water, the matron takes wet mud from the water, rubs it on the girl's legs, and then she takes a branch and splashes the water over the girl. Finally, both of them take hold of the branch and strike the water. The matron then fills the girl's bucket and her own, puts one on the girl's head, and then the procession returns home. After this the girl is perfectly free to use water whenever she likes, except when she has her period. Nothing is said, so far as I know, when the girl is reintroduced to water, but when a widow is similarly splashed all over the old woman says: "!Gàra 823 dama góure ǂhaba ǂhabare"* (Don't get thin, get fat, fat as [844] the ǂhaba tuber). In the case of a woman with a baby, it will [755] be the older women who have looked after her who will free her from all her restrictions. In the case of a person with some disease, it will be the inoculator who will do it, but always the procedure is the same, so far as the water is concerned. When 823 I was in Windhoek, this last Christmas, a woman died on a 841 neighbouring farm, but was brought in to be buried by her friends in the location. What the real cause of death was I do not know for certain: it may have been heart failure, as it was very sudden. The natives' account is quite definite. The woman had her period, yet started to do her mistress's washing in cold water. She just died on the spot! Several other instances I got in Franzfontein from women who had been working for

* ǂHabas is *Fockea damarana*, Schltr., an Asclepiad with a large tuber. 95 per cent of the weight is made up by a thin milky juice. The tuber is eaten raw. ǂHaba ǂHaba is a verb formed by reduplication from this noun.

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white people and who told me that they were now sickly, and never got any children, because they had been made to work with cold water, when they should not have done so. 823 841

The sea as the greatest accumulation of cold water is very dangerous for people in an unstable condition. I was given a very graphic description of a tragedy that occurred not so very long ago. Three young girls were walking along the beach at Swakopmund very happily and merrily, when all of a sudden the sea became angry and seemed to be on top of them. Two of the girls calling out, " Who here has her period? " rushed up the beach in safety, the third just had time to shout out, " I have," when she was dragged under by the waves and drowned! The woman who told me this lives inland from Walvis Bay. The other woman who had been with her was afterwards my cook far north in Franzfontein, and she confirmed the story of the drowning. In these degenerate days, the Naman find it very inconvenient to have their women incapacitated so often and unable to attend to their daily tasks, and they have discovered that for most women it is quite safe to do these tasks, only they must not touch cold water. It is only certain women who are said to be !Khai !na, forbidden or dangerous, who cannot do these things, and a sure way of finding out is to take a woman along the seashore when first she kharus. If she is !Khai !na, the sea will rush out towards her, and she will have to take great care not to be drawn in. The woman to whom this happens must not dare to do anything during her period, for she would be a danger to all who touched her food, or the milk she had milked. For there is this great difference between most things a woman is forbidden to do, and the touching of cold water. Cold water she can never harm, it will always harm her, be she !kai !na or not, if she uses it when she should not, whereas it is she who pollutes other things that she touches and makes them !nõu, taboo. Thus, if a girl should kharú out in the veld when she and her companions are gathering roots and berries, her companions contrive turn by turn to carry her back to the kraal, for if she walks among the bushes she will scorch them, the succulent roots will shrivel up, and the leaves wither from the bushes. If she milks a cow, its milk will turn to blood. (I am told that a cow does sometimes give a reddish fluid instead of milk.) If she cooks a meal those who eat it, especially men, will be very ill. Always after a girl has been reintroduced to the water, she and the old woman take a branch which they dip into a bucket of water and scatter it over the whole kraal, bushes, pens, sheep, goats and cattle.

We have dealt now with the cases in which water is a protection against dangers, and with those in which water itself is dangerous. There are just two other little rites connected with water which seem to me a little different. 823 852

Both in Walvis Bay and in Franzfontein I was told that babies are taken out into the first rainstorm which occurs after they are in a position to be removed from the hut, that is, after

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823 852 the navel string has fallen off. In Walvis Bay the baby is taken out and turned over and over in the rain by the mother or grandmother, so that it will know the rain and not be frightened of it, I was told. An Africander woman gave me a rather different account. The baby is taken out by one of the women who has been present at the birth, and is laid on a piece of skin in the rain. The old woman jumps over the child and back again; then lifts it up, tossing it this way and that in the rain, saying, " Hei-a Hei-a Tú gaba tsi " (I toss you in the rain). This is done, said the old woman, so that the rain will not hurt the baby. It is the baby's introduction to the source of water.

823 881 [842] Of another type of case I have never been able to get information myself among the tribes I have visited, but Theophilus Hahn writes: " The girl or girls who have become of age must, after the festival, run about in the first thunderstorm, but they must be quite naked, so that the rain which pours down washes the whole body. The belief is that they will get fruitful and have a large offspring." He continues: " I have on three occasions witnessed this running in the thunder rain, when the roaring of the thunder was deafening and the whole sky appeared to be one continual flash of lightning. This was among the !Gami /Nun; among the gei /Khauas at //Nuis, and among the //Ogeis on the banks of the !Kham River."*

These three tribes I have never visited myself and do not know if this ceremony used to take the place of the usual method of reintroducing the girls to water, or whether it was additional. I rather think it must have been additional, otherwise the girls would be prevented from using water over too long periods in many cases. The underlying motive of the ceremony seems the same as in the many we have noticed. The girls being now full members of society, the rain will protect them and help them to attain the full life of their new status.

823 182 Such are the Nama ceremonies connected with water. I have tried to show that they are all intelligible and form an harmonious whole if we realise that water is, of all the essentials of a social life, the most difficult for this primitive people to provide, that it is, therefore, one of their most important social possessions, and is invested with great power, essentially protective and wholesome so long as social life runs its normal course, but exceedingly dangerous to all the forces which threaten society, or to the members of the society themselves when the social bonds are loosened.

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* *Tsuni //Goam*, p. 87.